DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 535 EA 005 132

AUTHOR Purl, Mabel C.; Dawson, Judith
TITLE An Analysis of Some of the Effects of "Schools Without Failure" Seminars on Participating Schools.
PUB DATE Mar 73
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (58th, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 25-March 1, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Achievement; Curriculum; Discipline; *Educational Change; *Elementary Schools; *Evaluation; *Failure Factors; Grading; Group Dynamics; Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Homework; Parent Teacher Conferences; *Student Behavior; Success Factors; Surveys; Tables (Data); Testing
IDENTIFIERS *Glasser (William); Schools Without Failure

ABSTRACT

Written questionnaires were completed by the teachers, principals, and students of those elementary schools participating in the 1970-71 seminars based on William Glasser's concept of Schools Without Failure. The questionnaires were designed primarily to determine what changes had occurred since the seminars began and whether or not the schools were still following practices contrary to Glasser's concept. Teachers and principals were asked to indicate the changes that had occurred in grading, testing, grouping, discipline, classroom meetings, parent conferences, curriculum, and homework. The pupils of teachers who had attended the seminars responded to survey items dealing with involvement, relevance, thinking, and responsibility. Responses indicate that the seminar program apparently had positive effects on students and on teachers. Findings reveal that students have become more responsible for their own behavior, and have learned to express themselves better and to listen to and respect the opinions of others. In addition, communication between teachers has improved, and teachers have become more aware of students' needs and are better able to handle their own discipline problems. (Author/WM)

MAY 10 1973 34.05

ED 078535

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

AN ANALYSIS OF SOME OF THE EFFECTS OF "SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE" SEMINARS ON PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Presented at the
American Education Research Association Convention
New Orleans, Louisiana
February 25 - March 1, 1973

MABEL C. PURL, Ph.D.
Director
Research and Evaluation

Assisted by:

JUDITH DAWSON
Research Analyst

Riverside Unified School District
Riverside, California

EA 005 132

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	iii
Introduction	1
Teacher and Principal Surveys	1
Grading	2
Testing	3
Grouping	4
Discipline	5
Classroom Meetings	5
Parent Conferences and Involvement	7
Curriculum	7
Homework	8
Results of Changes	9
Pupil Surveys	9
Involvement	10
Relevance	11
Thinking	12
Responsibility	13
Summary	13

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Number and Per Cent of Teachers Indicating Changes in Each Area	2
2.	Number of Teachers Who Use Objective, Subjective, and Open-book Tests and Percentage of Time Each Type Issued	4
3.	Responses to Question: Do You Use Objective Tests for Grading?	4
4.	Number of Classroom Meetings Usually Held Each Week	6
5.	Per Cent of Classroom Meetings Which Are of Each Type	7
6.	Approximate Number of Hours of Homework Assigned Each Week . .	8
7.	Pupil Responses to Items Regarding Involvement	10
8.	Pupil Responses to Items Regarding Relevance	11
9.	Pupil Responses to Items Regarding Thinking	12
10.	Pupil Responses to Items Regarding Responsibility	13

AN ANALYSIS OF SOME OF THE EFFECTS OF "SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE" SEMINARS ON PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Introduction

A majority of the teachers at Grant, Harrison, Pachappa, and Washington Elementary Schools participated during the 1970-1971 school year in seminars based upon William Glasser's concept of Schools Without Failure, described in his book of that title.

Glasser believes that schools should be free of failure because all children should experience success in at least one important area of their lives, and school is the only place where some children have a chance to succeed. Those who do not experience success as children become adults who believe themselves incapable of succeeding and from whom many social problems arise.

There are certain factors in the educational system which almost automatically lead to school failure. For example, letter grades usually mean failure for some children, especially if the grades are distributed "normally" so that some of the lower students naturally receive D's and F's.

In line with his belief that some school practices are conducive either to school success or school failure, Glasser recommends practices which he thinks will help prevent failure and will lead to success and an educational philosophy of involvement, relevance, and thinking. He does not recommend a particular "program" as such; schools may vary in numerous important ways and still be consistent with Glasser's concept of schools without failure. In this instance, what schools do not do may be as important as what they do.

An intensive analysis or evaluation of the results of the teacher seminars has not been attempted. However, written questionnaires were completed by teachers, principals and students. These questionnaires were designed primarily to determine what changes had occurred since the seminars began and whether or not the schools were still following practices which are contrary to the concept of "Schools Without Failure."

Teacher and Principal Surveys

Teachers were asked to indicate the changes, resulting from their participation in the Glasser program, which occurred in eight areas: grading, testing, grouping, discipline, classroom meetings, parent

conferences, curriculum, and homework. They were then asked to indicate the areas in which they did not make changes last year but in which they plan to make changes next year. The responses to those items are shown in Table 1, below.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PER CENT OF TEACHERS INDICATING CHANGES IN EACH AREA

Area	Last Year		Next Year		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Grading	16	29	4	7	20	36
Testing	12	22	5	9	17	31
Grouping	12	22	14	25	26	47
Discipline	42	76	3	5	45	82
Classroom meetings	43	78	4	7	47	85
Parent conferences	14	25	20	36	34	62
Curriculum	15	27	7	13	22	40
Homework	1	2	4	7	5	9
Other	1	2	2	4	3	5

Note:
Number of teachers responding: 55.

Grading

Glasser maintains, "Probably the school practice that most produces failure in students is grading . . . The only acceptable grades are good ones, and these good grades divide the school successes from the school failures . . . the kind of education offered (relevance and thinking) and the way it is offered (involvement) have much more to do with incentive than grades." He recommends that report cards be eliminated and that parents be given a written report emphasizing what the child is doing and where he needs to improve. He does, however, favor giving a superior (S) grade in recognition of superior work.

Thirty-six per cent of the teachers indicated that they either made changes in grading last year or plan to make such changes next year. Most of the descriptions of the changes indicated that letter grades had either been abolished or were receiving less attention. One teacher said that she would like to adopt Glasser's grading policy but can't because of District policy. Principals also said that they want to eliminate grades as soon as permitted.

Teachers were asked to specify the method used for reporting to pupils an evaluation of performance on tests, homework, and seatwork, the areas in which teachers have a choice as to method used. Almost no primary teachers reported using letter grades; most used oral or

written comments, number correct, etc. Most upper grade teachers used letter grades.

Teachers who used letter grades were asked whether or not they attempted to distribute the grades normally, so that some students received D's and F's. In his book Glasser states, "If one had to devise a method of measurement to reduce motivation in education, the normal curve would be it." He believes that its use requires teachers to make only a superficial evaluation of students, that a teacher may stimulate his students to learn, give them a reasonable test, and then assign low grades to some students who do well, but do less well than other students. Only two teachers reported that they did try to distribute grades normally.

Testing

Glasser sees objective testing as another "practice that helps produce mediocre education." Most objective tests, he believes, require students to memorize facts rather than to think independently. "Thinking beyond elementary problem solving will not be stimulated in school as long as we rely on objective tests in which students are encouraged to think toward the known right answer instead of the unknown or the uncertain . . . Objective tests discourage research, discourage thoughtful reading, discourage listening to anything but fact."

Closed-book examination is also considered to be a poor educational practice. He prefers open-book tests, which "teach children to use reference material quickly and efficiently, to give thought to necessary reference material, and to utilize facts to solve problems, develop concepts, and explore issues."

Referring again to Table 1, 22 per cent of the teachers made changes in testing last year; an additional 9 per cent plan to make changes next year. Some of the changes described were: fewer tests, more open-book tests, tests that teach and provoke thinking, using tests to assess needs, and more individualized testing.

Teachers were asked to indicate, within a range of 25, what per cent of the tests they gave were objective, subjective, or open-book. The number of teachers checking each response is shown in Table 2. Most primary teachers either did not respond or specified that the item was not applicable since they gave few tests. While eleven of the twenty-four responding upper grade (four to six) teachers indicated that less than 25 per cent of the tests they gave were objective, they also indicated that less than 25 per cent of their tests were open-book. Subjective tests were rather evenly distributed among the response categories; they were apparently used more frequently than were either objective or open-book tests.

Teachers were asked whether or not they used objective tests to help assign grades. The responses are shown in Table 3. Most primary

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO USE OBJECTIVE, SUBJECTIVE, AND OPEN-BOOK TESTS AND PERCENTAGE OF TIME EACH TYPE IS USED

Response Categories	Objective		Subjective		Open-book	
	Primary	Upper	Primary	Upper	Primary	Upper
Less than 25 per cent	7	11	6	7	2	14
25-50 per cent	1	6	1	6	. .	2
50-75 per cent	1	5	1	5	2	6
More than 75 per cent	. .	1	. .	5	1	. .
No response or not applicable	15	1	16	1	19	2
Total	24	24	24	24	24	24

TABLE 3

RESPONSES TO QUESTION: DO YOU USE OBJECTIVE TESTS FOR GRADING?

Response Categories	Primary	Upper
Yes	2	17
No	5	4
Don't give objective tests	17	3
Total	24	24

teachers did not give objective tests; most upper grade teachers did use objective tests for grading.

Grouping

Because he believes that separating poor students from those who do better causes the lower groups to feel failure, Glasser favors heterogeneous classes. He does favor homogeneous reading groups if there are many behavior problems and many reading failures, but since these two conditions usually do not exist in significant numbers until the third grade, homogeneous reading groups are not needed in the first and second grades. Glasser believes that separating children into groups within their regular classes emphasizes differences, discouraging slower students.

Table 1 shows that 22 per cent of the teachers changed their grouping practices last year and that 25 per cent more plan grouping changes for

next year. The changes were primarily to more flexible grouping and to grouping according to interests and factors other than ability.

The teachers were asked if they grouped pupils for: (1) reading instruction and (2) instruction in areas other than reading. Thirty-eight of forty-six teachers indicated that they grouped pupils for reading instruction; thirty-seven of forty-three teachers indicated that they grouped pupils for other areas of instruction also.

The grouping practices described by teachers referred primarily to within-class grouping, although many teachers in team situations probably referred also to inter-class grouping. The four principals were asked to specify the criteria which are used to assign pupils to classrooms. The responses were: (1) "Reading, social, emotional, etc.," (2) "Varies with team and subject matter," (3) "A good mix in all rooms," and (4) "Heterogeneous--nongraded and individualized as much as we can within four classes primary and four classes upper--cross-age helpers, etc."

Discipline

Glasser proposes that children who misbehave in class should be asked to make value judgments about their behavior and to commit themselves to changing that behavior. The child should then be required to follow through with the commitment.

As shown in Table 1, 76 per cent of the teachers changed their methods of discipline last year and 5 per cent of the teachers who didn't make changes last year plan to make them next year. The descriptions of the changes indicated that the teachers followed Glasser's recommendations for self-evaluation and commitment and tried to be more positive.

Three of the four principals indicated that the number of pupils referred to them for disciplinary purposes decreased following their participation in the Glasser program; the fourth principal indicated no change. All four principals said that the types of problems referred to them changed--more problems were resolved in the classroom after the seminars began. The principals used Glasser's approach in working with children who were referred, making the children more responsible for their own behavior by obtaining commitments from them to change that behavior. The changes were ascribed partially to the Glasser program and partially to other factors.

Classroom Meetings

An important part of the Glasser-type program are daily classroom meetings in which the teacher leads the entire class, seated in a tight circle, in a non-judgmental discussion of things that are important and relevant to them. Good class meetings are considered to promote involvement, stimulate children to think, and make education more relevant.

Table 1 shows that more teachers indicated that they had made changes in classroom meetings than in any of the other areas. Seventy-eight per cent of the teachers made changes last year; an additional 7 per cent plan to make such changes next year. When asked to describe the changes, the teachers said that they held more class meetings last year than previously; that the content of the meetings changed, requiring students to think and to express their opinions regarding questions to which there are no "right" or "wrong" answers; that there was more involvement, with more children participating; and that the physical arrangement (i.e., everyone seated in a circle) changed.

Teachers were asked how many classroom meetings they usually held each week; their responses are shown in Table 4. Only one of forty-seven responding teachers reported daily class meetings. Almost all of the teachers reported that they usually held three or fewer classroom meetings per week.

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF CLASSROOM MEETINGS USUALLY HELD EACH WEEK

Number of Meetings Per Week	Number Responding	
	Primary	Upper
1	2	2
2	8	2
1-2	1	3
3	7	3
1-3	1	2
2-3	3	7
4	1	1
3-4	1	2
5	. .	1
Total	24	23

Glasser has defined three basic types of class meetings: social-problem-solving, concerned with students' social behavior in school; open-ended, concerned with intellectually important subjects; and educational-diagnostic, concerned with how well the students understand the concepts of the curriculum. Teachers were asked to estimate what proportion of their meetings were of each type. The responses are shown in Table 5. The table shows that both primary and upper grade teachers held open-ended meetings more frequently than social-problem-solving and educational-diagnostic meetings, with the latter type being held least frequently.

TABLE 5

PER CENT OF CLASSROOM MEETINGS WHICH ARE OF EACH TYPE

Response Categories	Social-Problem-Solving		Open-ended		Educational-Diagnostic	
	Primary	Upper	Primary	Upper	Primary	Upper
Less than 25 per cent	12	10	1	3	18	18
25-50 per cent	7	6	6	5	4	5
50-75 per cent	3	3	8	8	1	1
More than 75 per cent	1	5	9	8	. .	. .
Total	23	24	24	24	23	24

Parent Conferences and Involvement

Although Glasser makes few specific recommendations regarding parent conferences in Schools Without Failure, this item was added to the questionnaire after the principals involved said that parent conferences had changed.

As shown in Table 1, 25 per cent of the teachers changed their parent conferences last year and an additional 36 per cent plan to change parent conferences next year.

Parent conferences were described as more positive than previously, stressing students' successes rather than their failures; students often attended the conferences; and conferences were held more frequently.

School principals said that parents became more involved in pupil achievement, pupil discipline, curriculum, discussion groups, and in volunteer help in the school. Asked whether the increased parent involvement was entirely, partially, or not due to the Glasser program, two principals said that the change was partially due to the program; the other two said that it was not due to the program.

Curriculum

Glasser believes that if the school curriculum is not relevant, children do not gain the motivation to learn. When the curriculum is relevant, students too often do not understand its relevance, thus its value is missed. Relevance should be taught when necessary. Glasser states, "Too much school material is unrealistic, unemotional, and dull." Emotion should be present in classrooms; "a totally quiet, orderly, unemotional class is rarely learning."

Twenty-seven per cent of the teachers modified their curriculum

last year; 13 per cent plan to make curricular changes next year.

Pupil involvement in planning the curriculum was the type of curricular change mentioned by most teachers. Some teachers said that they tried to make the curriculum more relevant to the students' interests; a few teachers mentioned individualization.

Homework

An important contribution to educational failure, as seen by Glasser, is the assignment of excessive, tedious, and often irrelevant homework. Glasser defends homework for upper-grade students, who can profit from working independently at home. The assignments, however, should not be excessive or irrelevant.

Table 1 shows that 2 per cent of the teachers changed homework assignments last year and that an additional 7 per cent plan to change them next year. The four teachers who described homework changes said: (1) "(homework will be a) consequence of interest or unfinished work," (2) "I will give more effective homework," (3) "More," and (4) "Less reliance (on homework), more emphasis on class participation."

Responses to the question, "Approximately how many hours of homework do you assign each week?" are shown in Table 6. Primary teachers assigned almost no homework. The homework assignments of upper grade teachers were not excessive. Whether or not they were relevant is another question.

TABLE 6

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF HOURS OF HOMEWORK ASSIGNED EACH WEEK

Hours	Primary	Upper
None	17	2
1	3	8
1½	. .	2
1-1½	. .	1
2	. .	2
2-2½	. .	1
2-4	. .	1
5	. .	2
5-6	. .	1
Total	20	20

Results of Changes

When asked to describe the changes which they observed in their classes, or in individual pupils, as a result of the modifications they made, most teachers described differences resulting from changes in discipline methods and/or classroom meetings. The teachers said that self-evaluation and commitment made the children more responsible for their own behavior. Classroom meetings led to more frequent, and better self-expression and helped teachers get to know their pupils better. Children also learned to listen to each other and to respect the opinions of others. A few quotes from teachers:

> "Classroom meetings have given our class a feeling of mutual responsibility--a unity--a 'class spirit'. Glasser-type discipline has been extremely effective with some of my more serious behavior problems, and has made all of the children more responsible for their own actions."
>
> "Children are more willing to solve their own problems and be responsible. Therefore discipline is improved and this gives more time for instruction."
>
> "Children are able to work better in groups, have more confidence in themselves, better attitudes toward peers."
>
> "Many students have come to the realization that <u>they</u> have something to contribute and that someone else wants to listen to them."

The principals indicated that the seminars had a positive effect on teachers. Communication between staff members improved. Teachers became more aware of the needs of their pupils and more concerned with meeting those needs. As one principal said, "The weekly seminar group discussion for teachers has been most valuable since it provides an opportunity for additional time to discuss our philosophy, needs and involvement of children, relevance of the school program and ways of helping children to think and assume responsibility for their own actions."

Pupil Surveys

Brief surveys were completed by all pupils whose teachers attended the seminars. The survey items may be grouped into four categories: involvement, relevance, thinking, and responsibility.

Involvement

Responses to the survey items which attempted to determine whether or not students felt that they were really involved with their classes are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7

PUPIL RESPONSES TO ITEMS REGARDING INVOLVEMENT

Items and Response Choices	Per Cent Responding
Primary grades	
The other children in my classes like to know what I think about things.	
Yes	79
No	21
I like to tell my teachers what I think about things.	
Yes	86
No	14
Upper grades	
My classmates and teachers are interested in my opinions.	
Yes	23
I think so	31
I don't know	33
I don't think so	6
No	6
I feel left out of things in my classes.	
Always	6
Often	7
Sometimes	45
Never	42

Relevance

Three survey items were designed to determine whether or not the students thought that learning to read would help them later in life and was important to their lives outside of school. The responses are shown in Table 8. (A fourth related item which was included in the upper-grade survey was omitted from this analysis because it was ambiguously worded and did not elicit reliable responses.) All three items referred to learning to read, which is probably seen as the most relevant skill taught in school. It would be interesting to see the responses to similar items which referred to other skill and subject areas.

TABLE 8

PUPIL RESPONSES TO ITEMS REGARDING RELEVANCE

Items and Response Choices	Per Cent Responding
Primary grades	
Learning to read well now will help me when I get older.	
Yes	96
No	4
Reading is important for things besides school.	
Yes	86
No	14
Upper grades	
Learning to read well now will help me when I am in junior and senior high school.	
Yes	85
I think so	9
I don't know	4
I don't think so	1
No	2

Thinking

Responses to the items designed to tap thinking are shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9

PUPIL RESPONSES TO ITEMS REGARDING THINKING

Items and Response Choices	Per Cent Responding
Primary grades	
I like to tell my teachers what I think about things.	
Yes	86
No	14
Upper grades	
There is only one correct answer to every question.	
Yes	27
I think so	10
I don't know	6
I don't think so	11
No	46
To do well in school, it is more important that I learn facts than think about things.	
Yes	44
I think so	13
I don't know	17
I don't think so	6
No	20

Responsibility

To find out whether or not the students felt responsible for what happened to them the items shown in Table 10, below, were developed.

TABLE 10

PUPIL RESPONSES TO ITEMS REGARDING RESPONSIBILITY

Items and Response Choices	Per Cent Responding
Primary grades	
If someone gets mad at me, it is usually because I did something to make them mad.	
Yes	83
No	17
If someone wants to do better in school, he should work harder.	
Yes	94
No	6
Upper grades	
How well I do in school depends on how hard I work.	
Yes	75
I think so	13
I don't know	6
I don't think so	3
No	4

Most pupils' responses to the survey items indicated that they felt involved in school, they thought that learning to read was relevant to them, and that they felt responsible for their own behavior. However, the responses of the upper grade students to items related to thinking in school revealed that this is an area of weakness. Twenty-seven per cent of the students responded "Yes" to the item, "There is only one correct answer to every question"; an additional 27 per cent weren't sure. Forty-four per cent said that "To do well in school, it is more important that I learn facts than think about things; 36 per cent weren't sure."

Summary

As explained at the beginning of this report, it was not the intent of this analysis to attempt to determine whether or not the schools involved in the Glasser seminars were truly "Schools Without Failure" or, if they were, what the effects had been. Rather than focusing upon Glasser's total concept, this analysis is restricted to the areas in which Glasser either encourages or discourages specific practices which

he feels lead either to success or failure. The three primary questions which this analysis attempted to answer are: (1) Did changes occur in the areas in which Glasser makes recommendations? (2) Were Glasser's recommendations followed? (3) Did student responses to questionnaire items indicate a school philosophy of involvement, relevance, and thinking and a sense of responsibility and control over what happens to them?

Basically, the answer to all of these questions is yes.

More of the teachers (27 per cent) made changes in discipline and in classroom meetings than in any of the other areas mentioned. Students began to evaluate their own behavior and, if it was not acceptable, to make commitments to change that behavior. Classroom meetings in which many relevant topics were discussed by teachers and students seated in a tight circle were held. Approximately 25 per cent of the teachers made changes in grading, testing, grouping, parent conferences, and curriculum. Most of the changes were in agreement with Glasser's recommendations.

Glasser's recommendations are more congruous with typical practices in primary grades than in upper grades. Accordingly, more primary than upper grade teachers followed Glasser's recommendations.

Letter grades were seldom used by primary grade teachers but often used by upper grade teachers. Primary teachers gave few tests; upper grade teachers gave objective tests sparingly but did use them for grading. Both primary and upper grade teachers reported grouping pupils for many areas of instruction but were moving toward flexible grouping and away from ability grouping. Discipline methods and classroom meetings advocated by Glasser were adopted by the teachers, although Glasser recommends daily class meetings and most teachers held only two or three each week. Forty per cent of the teachers either modified their curriculum last year or plan to modify it next year. Homework assignments were not excessive although it is not known whether or not they were relevant.

Students indicated that they felt involved in school, they thought that school was relevant, and they felt responsible for their own behavior. They did not, however, indicate that thinking had become an important part of the school philosophy.

The program was described as having positive effects on students and on teachers. Students became more responsible for their own behavior, learned to express themselves better, and learned to listen to and respect the opinions of others. Communication between teachers improved. Teachers became more aware of students' needs. Using Glasser's method, teachers were able to handle more of their own discipline problems, referring fewer pupils to the principals for disciplining.